



God Desires Mercy, Not Sacrifice (Death)

By Matthew K. Boyle on June 7, 2024

TODAY'S READING: 1 Kings 21

We sometimes open the Old Testament with an unwitting expectation of God's judgment. And we certainly see it here in 1 Kings 21. We stand with God, ready to issue God's justice in the form of the death penalty for Ahab and Jezebel. If Ahab was not evil enough, he was incited by one more wicked than himself—Jezebel. She was wicked to the core. Without recounting the story, it is noteworthy to recognize that a direct violation of one of the ten commandments occurs. It's the ninth commandment:

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16, ESV).

Naboth and King Ahab were neighbors—literally. So no justifiable case could have been made by asking a question like a lawyer did of Jesus when he asked, *"who is my neighbor?"* (Luke 10:29). The direct violation of that commandment brought about God's immediate judgment on both Ahab and Jezebel.

But then an unexpected twist happens in the story, one that battles against our own judgmental proclivities, if we are honest.

After pronouncing in vivid, gruesome detail what will become of Ahab and Jezebel, Ahab repents! Surely God will see past his façade and declare Ahab's punishment!

But God withheld for a time. Why?

Unlike us, even when we are incensed at what we hear or read, God judges justly—all the time. The bible tells us that *"the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7, ESV). We don't. Our lack of "heart knowledge" leaves us as poor executors of justice—even when it seems like there is no doubt that we are right.

But thank God that his justice is not like ours. If it were, we would all be under God's wrath and judgment—just like Ahab and Jezebel.

Jesus speaks to us, as he did to the disciples and religious leaders when he says *"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"* (Matthew 9:13; ref. Hosea 6:6). Sacrifice always involved death so another way to understand this is that God desires mercy, even toward the most hardened of sinners, and not the penalty of death (sacrifice)—if repentance occurs as it did with Ahab.

Let's be thankful for God's mercy from withholding justice on us and instead pouring it out on his only Son Jesus. Let's be slow to judge.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to know your heart for exercising mercy. Thank you for the salvation you offer in Jesus alone and for not judging me as my sins deserve. Amen.

TOMORROW'S READING: Weekend is for catch-up and review.

MONDAY'S READING: Esther 2

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